

## A VENETIAN STUDY.

THE PRINTING PRESS IN THE CITY OF THE SEA.

THE VENETIAN PRINTING PRESS: An Historical Study based Upon Documents for the Most Part Heretofore Unpublished. By Horatio F. Brown, twenty-two fac-similes of early printing. Quarto, pp. xxvi, 463. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

The history of the Venetian printing press is recounted at length and with diligent research and ample erudition in this beautiful volume, the author and publishers of which have evidently striven to make it not only a true record and chronicle, but a typographical monument worthy the importance and interest of the subject. Mr. Horatio Brown has expended great labor upon the work, and has brought to light a treasury of documents bearing upon it, many of which he has reproduced in the appendices, which occupy fully half the space of the massive volume. Of course a great part of the information thus brought together has been printed before, but for the most part, if not altogether, in foreign tongues, and in works inaccessible to the general public. But the original papers are full of interest, and not a few among them illuminate the details of printing and book-selling in the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century, with a fulness that leaves nothing to be desired. In the historical portion of his comprehensive work, Mr. Brown naturally devotes special attention to the relations of the Venetian printing press to the Church and the State. The circumstances in Venice were indeed not radically different from those in other States during the periods concerned. In all alike a struggle went on—the one to establish freedom of thought and expression, and on the other to secure control of both, to the end that they might be compelled to serve the dominant powers, or, failing this, that they might be suppressed.

The close relationship which coincidence brought between the printing press and the Reformation inevitably impelled the Church of Rome to grapple at once and earnestly with the new agency for disseminating thought—and heresy. The Inquisition and the Index were the instrumentalities employed for this purpose, and but for one circumstance it seems quite possible that the unequal contest might have ended in the complete extinction of printing. That saving circumstance was the civil power's constant jealousy of the ecclesiastical power. The conflict between Church and State was for centuries centred upon the rival claims of Popes and Kings to secular supremacy. The temporal pretensions of Rome continually embroiled her with the rulers of Europe, and the Republic of Venice was not less determined than the Kings of France and Emperors of Germany to resist all their attempts at Roman domination. So far as belief in free speech went, the Venetian oligarchy was no more liberal or advanced than the Church. In fact, when the printing press was not being harassed by the Inquisition it was generally in difficulties with the State; and could the two powers ever have come into accord with one another, the press must have perished between the upper and the nether mill-stone. Fortunately for civilization the Republic observed all the proceedings of Rome with a vigilant and suspicious eye, and while on abstract principles it did not recognize the freedom of the printing press, it strongly disapproved of interference in its affairs on the part of a foreign Power. The Venetian Republic was then in the pride of its strength and reputation, and apt to do things with the high hand. But the time had not yet come when any State could afford to set at nought the ghostly weapons of the Church. Sceptical and infidel rulers there were; men who smiled at the tumultuous of the Vatican and despised the system of the Inquisition. But these dared not avow their mental attitude, and experience had taught them that the limit of their ventures in opposition to Rome was to be found in the cruelty and superstition of their ignorant subjects. With these latter the communistic formulae of the Church were very real and very dreadful things. Excommunication and Interdict were capable of blasting the prosperity and disorganizing the social system of almost all countries. Once launched, these terrible measures isolated the monarch or the government attacked, and stripped him of the defence afforded by the loyalty of his people; and by suspending all the sacraments converted every one of his subjects into a personal enemy and a strenuous agitator for the yielding of that submission which could alone lift the curse from the banned territory. Thus it was that the haughtiest and ostensibly the strongest rulers feared to go to extremes in their disputes with Rome. They knew that they could not depend upon their own subjects in such a case, and that they were more likely to be deposed themselves than to conquer the Vatican.

There was indeed but one point on which they felt it necessary to make a resolute stand, and that was the question of supreme secular authority. The Roman weapons lost their terror here because submission to Roman arrogance would cost them as much as they could possibly be muted through excommunication and interdict. Their sovereignty was their life, and they must and would fight for it to the bitter end, no matter what the consequences. Whenever this issue was joined, therefore, the struggle was fierce and protracted, and the Church was often compelled to retire discomfited. This happened in the case of the printing-press in several countries, and once at least in Venice the Inquisition appears to have been either driven out or silenced. For a space of some twenty-five years, at the close of the sixteenth and opening of the seventeenth centuries, the record of press trials is blank, though immediately before the beginning of this period there had been an average of fifty trials a year for some time. But it was not always or long so. The strength of the Venetian Republic had culminated and was on the decline, and though the struggle with the Inquisition and the Congregation of the Index was kept up stubbornly, the secular government thereafter began to lose ground. Of course the interests of the printing-press were put in the background during this long contest. When the Inquisition had its own way it exercised a minute and exasperating inquiry, a house-to-house search, and put on trial every one even found in the same house with heretical books, whether or not there was any evidence of proprietorship. Mr. Brown gives particulars of one of these trials from the record, and it strikingly illustrates the nature and extent of the dominion claimed and exercised by the Church over the cultivation of the human mind. In some respects Venice sank below Spain in this regard. Spain at least maintained her own control over the Censorship, and would none of the Roman Index. But Venice sometimes was not strong enough to protect herself and had to submit to the ecclesiastical tyranny under futile protest.

The Censorship, which Mr. Brown examines very fully and carefully, was in its fundamental principles hostile to all intellectual growth and progress, and it made comparatively little difference whether it was administered by State or Church, both being equally illiberal. The State was just as eager in Venice as at least to put down heresy as the Church. The only dispute was as to who should carry on the work of suppression. So between the two arbitrary powers the Venetian printing-press inevitably fell from its pristine high estate, and the fortunes of the booksellers of necessity followed those of the printers. The position of the Venetian Seminary in the matter was untenable. It saw and deplored the decline of this once-flourishing industry, but, inasmuch as it was thoroughly committed to a grinding censorship itself, and to all the principles of the Roman Congregation, it could do nothing to hinder the mischief. What it tried to do only shows how blind even the most intelligent they were to the sequence of cause and effect. Attempts were made to restore the commercial status of the printing-press by legislation. It had fallen off as an art. Books were printed more and more badly. Paper, ink and press-work were alike inferior. The remedy sought to be applied was a statute fixing a standard of excellence, below which the printer should go. Of course it had no effect. The print-

ing-press only became more demoralized. Church and State between them had killed the poor victim. All the printers who retained any means left Venice in the beginning of the seventeenth century, and, so far as the printing-press was concerned, Ichabod might have been written on the proud city's walls. The story of this destruction of a great and beneficent industry is interesting and instructive, and Mr. Brown has told it amply and well, with abundant detail and unequalled store of authorities.

## BOOKS OF THE WEEK.

CHAMBERS' ENCYCLOPAEDIA. 6 vols., \$vo, pp. 823. (J. Lippincott Co.)

POLITICAL AMERICANISMS. By Charles L. Norton. (American Antislavery Society, Green & Co.)

BROWNE ON DIVORCE. By William H. Browne. \$vo, pp. 461. (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.)

THE NEW CONSTITUTION. By J. N. Cuming. \$vo, pp. 271. (Doubleday, Page & Co.)

HER LEVEE AND HIS LIFE. By F. W. Robinson. \$vo, pp. 212. (Harper & Brothers.)

HELD IS THE MAN. By W. L. Lowth. 12mo, pp. 191. (The Bancroft Co.)

BAY RIDGE FARM. By E. A. W. 16mo, pp. 183. (W. Heath.)

THE MURKIN. By J. F. Cooper. 12mo, pp. 408. (The Allston.)

STUDIES IN VOCAL LITERATURE. By W. Carew Hazell. 16mo, pp. 229. (A. L. Burt & Co.)

BURTRUM THE PRINCE. 16mo, pp. 27. (James Whitehead.)

RHYMES OF CHILDHOOD. By James Whitcomb Riley. 16mo, pp. 20. (The Bowen, Merrill Co.)

FIFTH'S CAVE. By J. P. MacLean. \$vo, pp. 49. (F. Clegg & Co.)

HUSSEIN THE HOSTAGE. By G. Souvay. 12mo, pp. 352. (Scribner & Welford.)

THE SUICIDE. By Frank S. Roberts. Principal. 12mo, pp. 100. (The Allston.)

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